

Billy the Buck

By HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS

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(Continued from Saturday's paper)

"Plenty good letter!" cried the Injun, his face beaming with pride. I coughed and said it was indeed vigorous. Steve and the boys fled the scene. Now, we knew that Jimmy was a good Injun or he wouldn't have had any letter at all. That great grave face, coupling the seriousness of childhood and of philosophy, simply offered an irresistible temptation to the writer of the letter. There was something pathetic in the way the gigantic savage folded up his treasure and replaced it in his coat. I think Forsythe would have weakened had he seen it. Still, after we laughed, we felt all the better disposed toward Jimmy, so I don't know but it was a good form of introduction, after all. Jimmy was looking for work, a subject of research not general to the Injun, but by no means so rare as his detractors would make out. He got it. The job was to clean out Billy Buck's corral. Steve found employment for the hands close to home for the day, that no one should miss the result. It is always business first on the ranch, and a practical joke takes precedence over other labors. Steve hung around the corral, where he could peek through the chinks. Hoarse whispers inquired, "Anything up yet?" were for so long answered in the negative that it seemed the day had been in vain. At last the welcome about rang out: "Injun and deer fight! Everybody run!" We flew, breathless with anticipatory chuckles. We landed on top of the shed to witness an inspiring scene—one long legged, six foot and a half Injun, suitably attired in a plug hat, cutaway coat, breech clout and moccasins, grappling in mortal combat a large and very angry deer.

Splendid was the exhibition of strength and agility we looked upon;



He outdid the wildest of our pitching horses for a half minute.

but, alas, its poetry was ripped up the back by the cutaway coat, the plug hat and the unrelated effect of those long, bare red legs twinkling beneath. Indirectly it was the plug hat that ended the battle. At first if Jimmy-Hit-the-Bottle felt any emotion, whether joy, resentment, terror or anything man can feel, his face did not show it. One of the strangest features of the show was that immaculately calm face suddenly appearing through the dust clouds, unconscious of storm and stress.

At last, however, a yank of the deer's head—Jimmy had him by the horns—caused the plug hat to snap off, and the next second the deer's sharp foot went through it. You will remember Achilles did not get excited until his helmet touched the dust. Well, from what the cold, pale light of fact shows of the size and prowess of those ancient swaggers, Jimmy-Hit-the-Bottle could have picked Achilles up by his vulnerable heel and bumped his brains out against a tree, and this without strain, so when the pride of his life, his precious plug hat, was thus maltreated his rage was vast in proportion.

His eyes shot streaks of black lightning. He twisted the deer's head sideways and with a leap landed on his back. Once there he seized an ear between his strong teeth and shut down. We rose to our feet and yelled. It was wonderful, but chaotic. I would defy a moving picture camera to resolve that tornado into its elements of deer and Injun. We were conscious of curious illusions, such as a deer with a dozen heads growing out of all parts of a body as spherical as this our earth, and an Injun with legs that vetoed all laws of gravitation and anatomy.

Poor Billy Buck! He outdid the wildest of our pitching horses for a half minute, but the two hundred and odd pounds he had on his back told. He couldn't hold the gait. Jimmy wrapped those long legs around him, the deer's tail in one hand, the horn in the other, and the ear between his

teeth, and waited in grim determination. "Me-ah-nan!" said the deer, dropping to his knees.

Jimmy got off him. Billy picked himself up and scampered to the other end of the corral, shaking his head.

The Injun straightened himself up, making an effort to draw a veil of modesty over the pride that shone in his eyes.

"H-nh!" he said. "Fool deer tackle Tatonka-Sutah!" ("Tatonka-Sutah," or Strong Bull, was the more poetic title of Jimmy-Hit-the-Bottle among his own kind.)

He then gravely punched his plug hat into some kind of shape and resumed his work.

We pitched in and bought Jimmy a shiny new plug hat, which will lead me far afield if I don't drop the subject.

Well, he was master of Mr. Billy Buck. When he entered the corral, the deer stepped rapidly up to the farther corner and stayed there.

Now came the broadening of Billy's career. A certain man in our nearest town kept a hotel near the railroad depot. For the benefit of the passengers who had to stop there a half hour for meals and recreation this man had a sort of menagerie of the animals natural to the country. There were a bear, a mountain lion, several coyotes, swifts, antelope, deer and a big timber wolf, all in a wire net inclosed park.

It so happened that Steve met Mr. D., the hotel proprietor, on one of his trips to town and told him what a splendid deer he had out at the ranch. Mr. D. became instantly possessed of a desire to own the marvel, and a bargain was concluded on the spot. Billy by this time had shed his horns and was all that could be wished for in the way of amiability. We tied his legs together and shipped him to town in a wagon.

Steve did not trick Mr. D. He told him plainly that the deer was a dangerous customer and that to be careful was to retain a whole skin, but the hotel proprietor, a little fat, pompous man, with a big bass voice—the kind of a man who could have made the world in three days and rested from the fourth to the seventh inclusive had it been necessary—thought he knew something of the deer character.

"That beautiful creature, with its mild eyes and humble mien, hurt any one? Nonsense!"

So he had a fine collar made for Billy, with his name on a silver plate, and then led him around town at the end of a chain, being a vain little man who liked to attract attention by any available means. All worked well until the next fall. Mr. D. was lulled into false security by the docility of his pet and allowed him the freedom of the city regardless of protest.

Then came the spectacular end of Billy's easy life. It occurred on another warm autumn day. The passengers of the noon train from the east were assembled in the hotel dining room, putting away supplies as fast as possible, the train being late. The room was crowded, the waiters rushing. Mr. D., swelling with importance, Billy entered the room unnoticed in the general hurry. A negro waiter passed him, holding two loaded trays. Perhaps he brushed against Billy; perhaps Billy didn't even need a provocation. At any rate as the waiter started down the room Billy smote him from behind, and dinner was served!

When the two tray loads of hot coffee, potatoes, soup, chicken and the rest of the bill of fare landed all over the nearest table of guests there was a commotion. Men leaped to their feet, with words that showed they were no gentlemen, making frantic efforts to wipe away the scalding liquids trickling over them. The ladies shrieked and were fearful over the ruin of their pretty gowns.

Mr. D. on the spot instantly quieted his guests as best he could on the one hand and berated the waiter for a clumsy, clumsy-footed baboon on the other. Explanation was difficult if not impossible. Arms flew, hard words flew, the male guests were not backward in adding their say. Then, even as I had been before, the colored man was vindicated.

Suddenly two women and a man sprang on top of the table and yelled for help. Mr. D. looked upon them open mouthed. The three on top of the table clutched one another and howled in unison. Mr. D.'s eye fell on Billy, crest up, warlike in demeanor, and also on a well dressed man backing rapidly under the table.

A flash of understanding illumined Mr. D. The deer evidently felt a little playful, but it would never do under the circumstances. "Come here, sir!" he commanded. Billy only lived to obey such a command, as I have shown. But this time Mr. D. recognized a difference and went about like a crack yacht. He had intentions of reaching the door. Billy cut off retreat. Mr. D. thought of the well dressed man and dived under the table. Those who had stood uncertain, seeing this line of action taken by one who knew the customs of the country promptly imitated him. The passengers of the eastern express were

seated under the tables, with the exception of a handful who had preferred getting on top of them.

Outside three cow punchers who chanced to be riding by were perfectly astonished by the noises that came from that hotel. They dismounted and investigated. When they saw the feet projecting from beneath the cloths and the groups in statuesque poses above they concluded not to interfere, although strongly urged by the victims. "You are cowards!" cried the man with the two women. The punchers

joyfully acquiesced and said, "Sick 'em, boy!" to the deer.

Meanwhile the express and the United States mail were waiting. The conductor, watch in hand, strode up and down the platform.

"What do you suppose they're doing over there?" he asked his brakeman.

The brakeman shrugged his shoulders. "Ask them punchers," he replied. The conductor lifted his voice. "What's the matter?" he called.

"Oh, come and see! Come and see!" said the punchers. "It's too good to tell!"

The conductor shut his watch with a snap. "Five minutes late," he said. "Pete, go and hustle them people over here. I start in three minutes by the watch."

"Sure," said Pete and slouched across. Pete was surprised at the sight that met his gaze, but orders were orders. He walked up and kicked Billy, at the same time shouting: "All aboard for the west! Git a wiggle on yer!"

The man owed his life to the fact that the deer could get no foothold on the slippery hardwood floor; otherwise he would have been gored to death. As it was, Billy tried to push, and his feet shot out. Man and deer came to the floor together, the brakeman holding hard. The passengers boiled out of the hotel like a mountain torrent. The punchers, thinking that the man was in danger, sprang through the windows and tied the deer. Pete gasped his thanks and hustled out to catch his train. No one was left but Billy, the punchers, the waiters and Mr. D.

"This your deer?" inquired the punchers of the latter.

"It is," said Mr. D. "Take him out and hang him. Don't shoot him. Hang him!"

"All right," replied the punchers. They took Billy out and turned him loose in the deer pen.

"Reckon the old man 'll feel better about it tomorrow," they said.

And it came to pass that the old man did feel better, so Billy was spared. Perhaps if you have traveled to the west you have seen him, a noble representative of his kind. Well, this is his private history, which his looks belie.

A Horse's Nose.

A man at the horse market recently refused to buy an apparently desirable animal on the ground that "he had a Roman nose."

"A horse's nose tells a whole lot about his disposition," said the reader of equine character. "An animal with a prominent nose has courage and stubbornness in equal proportion; consequently he makes a first class balk. Noses of the pancake variety indicate meekness. A nose that is wide between the eyes denotes trustworthiness. A generally vicious temperament accompanies the nose that narrows at the top. Horses that run away, bite their neighbors and kick the dashboard into splinters have that type of nose. A horse with broad, flaring nostrils is a high liver; also he is lazy. The thin, sensitive nostrils belong to racers and high class carriage horses. Fire department horses usually have the aristocratic nasal lines. Deep horizontal ridges in a horse's nose indicate humility and even solemnity. Ministers' horses and those driven by undertakers are frequently marked by that peculiarity. Of course, there are exceptions to these deductions, but taken all in all the thoroughgoing horseman will pronounce them about right."

—New York Post.

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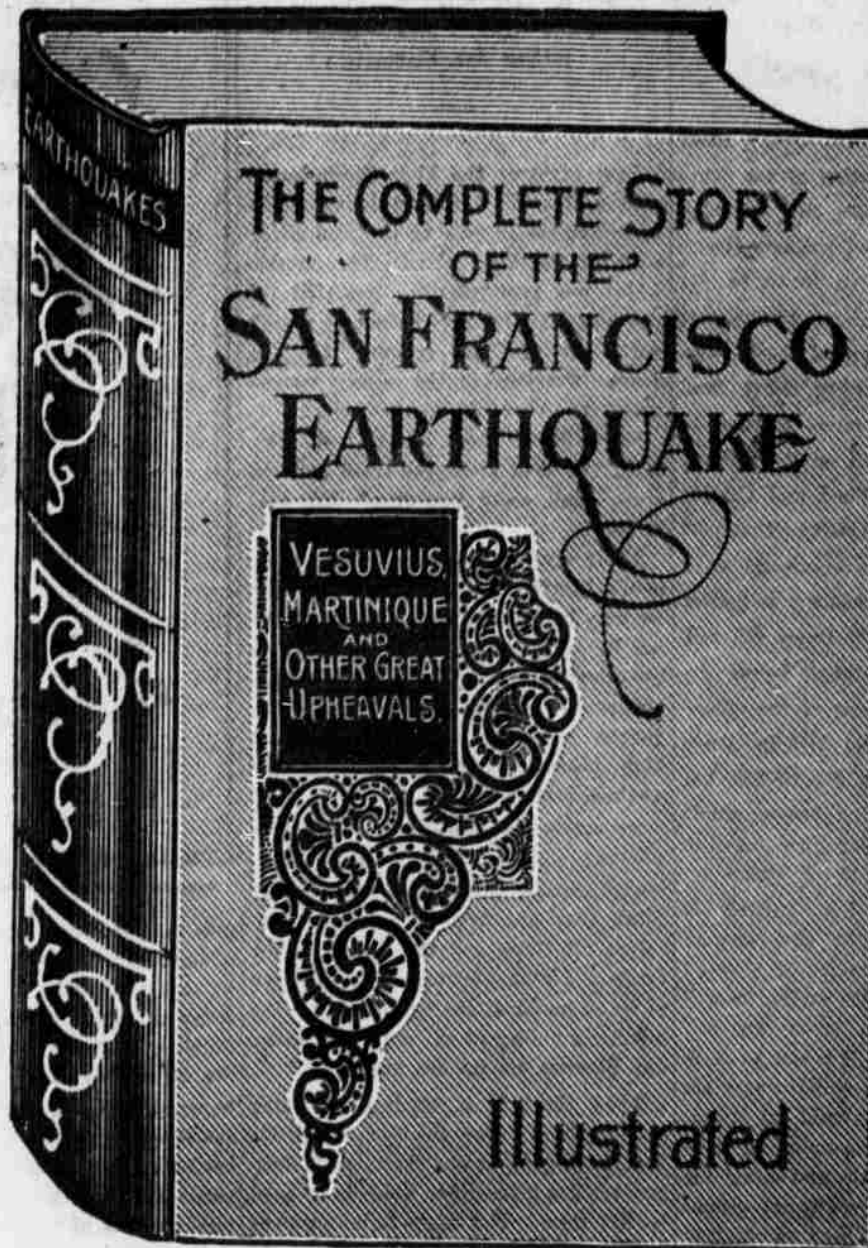
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